

State Representative

David McCluskey

20th Assembly District ★ West Hartford



End of Session 2003

Dear Neighbors:

After one of the most difficult and lengthy legislative sessions since the state income tax was enacted in 1991, I am very glad it is over.

The final budget deal for the current fiscal year included many significant changes in policy that had little public discussion during the legislative year – especially cuts which affect Seniors and CT residents on HUSKY, Medicaid or SAGA. I ended up voting NO on the budget – not because I was afraid of raising taxes or cutting services, but because many of the decisions made were very shortsighted, will hurt people and/or will cost more money in the long run for Connecticut taxpayers. Specifically as the budget affected Seniors, I voted against a ConnPACE Asset Test and against requiring the estates of seniors to repay the cost of ConnPACE benefits, and I voted against making it much more difficult and onerous for middle-income Seniors to qualify for skilled nursing/home health care benefits under Title 19. Sacrifices made should be shared equally among Connecticut residents and businesses and this budget came nowhere near a balanced solution.

With political power split between the Republicans controlling the Governor's Office and Democrats controlling the General Assembly, compromise is obviously needed to move our State forward. However, by agreeing to the lowest common denominator, the result ends up being neither fiscally prudent nor socially responsible for our state's long-term well-being. Connecticut residents must demand budget solutions that make sense over the long term, and I will continue to fight for state budgets that protect our pocketbooks as well as our quality of life.

This newsletter details some of the legislation I have worked on as well as other items/resources which may be of use to you and your family. As always, please call me at my legislative office: 240-8585 or at home: 521-3554 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

New Consumer Protections on Hospital Billing

As the Vice Chair of the Public Health Committee, I had the responsibility this year of bringing out legislation to give hospital patients more consumer rights when paying their bills. During a public hearing on the bill, there were many truly compelling stories of hospital patients who had their houses attached unjustly; who were paying extremely high interest on their hospital debts; and/or who were not made aware of free health care programs.



Public Act 03-266 provides many new safeguards for hospital patients; among them: requiring hospitals to better inform patients of free and reduced health care programs; limiting the interest on debt for hospital services to 5% a year; providing a \$125,000 homestead exemption in the case of a money judgment for hospital services; and specifying that compliance with an installment payment plan will prevent any property execution or foreclosure.

With many employers discontinuing or reducing their contribution for health insurance, it is important that hospital patients have consumer rights when up against aggressive bill collection practices.

New Law Provides Confidentiality to Employee Assistance Programs

As the Vice Chair of the Public Health Committee, I led the effort to enact a new law providing confidentiality for employee assistance programs (EAPs). For many years, the CT Chapter of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association has been trying to protect the clients they serve so that employees would utilize these counseling services without fear of disclosure which may affect their continued employment or career advancement.

Public Act 03-187, which passed unanimously in both the House and Senate, prohibits anyone from requiring an EAP professional or an employee to disclose information/records concerning an employee's voluntary participation in such a program unless disclosure is necessary to prevent harm to the employee or others. Connecticut's new law is among only a handful of state statutes around the country specifically protecting EAP services.

New Map of Regional Attractions

A new map of cultural and entertainment attractions in the Hartford-Springfield corridor was unveiled earlier this year. The new brochure, highlighting 40 key attractions in the borderless region from the Mark Twain House to Historic Deerfield, Massachusetts, was produced by a coalition of arts and tourism organizations in the Connecticut River Valley. The map will be distributed by the organizations as well as higher education institutions to show visitors and local residents the breadth of attractions in the region.

For a copy of this map, call the Greater Hartford Welcome Center at **860-244-0253**. You can also log on to their website at www.hartfordspringfield.com.

Free Computers

The Jim Mullen Foundation provides free computers for people with disabilities. The organization specializes in providing computers for anyone, but especially for those individuals who, because of their disability, think that they are unable to use them.



Their website is - www.jimmullen.com - then click on "downloads" for an application, or you can call **1-312-440-4251**.

Connecticut Coastal Birding Trail

The CT Coastal Birding Trail is being developed by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Wildlife Division with funding from the federal government. The project will result in the designation of a series of shoreline sites where people can view many of the nearly 400 species of birds which can be found in Connecticut throughout the year. The sites, located along the important Atlantic Flyway, provide nesting and foraging habitats for resident and migratory shorebirds, wading birds, water fowl and other wildlife.



Preliminary Birding Trail maps, which provide a guide to viewing many of these species, are available from local tourism offices or via the trail's website: www.ctbirdingtrails.org where you can get information and also nominate a site for inclusion on the trail. The maps will be updated as additional sites are selected. Many of the sites that will be on the Birding Trail are also listed in the Connecticut Coastal Access Guide. For a free copy of the CT Coastal Guide, contact the DEP at **(860) 424-3034** or e-mail: coastal.access@po.state.ct.us.

From *Sound Outlook*, CT DEP, Office of Long Island Sound Programs and Bureau of Water Management, October 2003, No. 14, p. 3.

UConn HealthNet

Do you have questions about your health or the health of a family member/friend? HealthNet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network, a program of the Lyman Maynard Stowe Library, UCONN Health Center, is a great place to begin your search. HealthNet's website: library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/ provides direct hyperlinks to a topic-by-topic list of recommended and updated health websites. Included are reliable websites on medical tests, medications, heart disease, Connecticut health resources, research news, nutrition and health care providers. There are also links to internet-based resource guides on navigating the health care system, patient advocacy, growing older, mental health and dental health resources.



HealthNet also provides free, customized consumer health research services for CT Residents. You can call HealthNet at **(860) 679-4055** to request a packet of information tailored to your health questions. Experienced medical information professionals will research the specific medical topics requested. HealthNet staff uses medical textbooks, medical journals, computer databases and the Internet as resources. HealthNet also has voice mail and requests can be left at any time. HealthNet provides health information but cannot provide medical advice, opinion or recommendations.

For more information, contact Judith Kronick at Kronick@uchc.edu or **(860) 679-4047**.

e-mail: david.mccluskey.@po.state.ct.us

CHOICES Program

The North Central Area Agency on Aging, Inc. (AAA), which serves West Hartford, offers CHOICES, an umbrella program for the following free services to people 60 and over:

- counseling and information about public and private insurance programs
- outreach
- information and referral to senior services
- counseling about resource options
- eligibility screening for State and Federal benefits and/or support programs

Those under 60 who are disabled and who need assistance regarding Medicare issues can also use CHOICES.

NCAAA provides program information to seniors and their families through educational activities and health fairs at locations such as senior centers and elderly housing complexes. You may request a speaker to talk about CHOICES at your community events.

In addition, there are training opportunities for those interested in becoming volunteer counselors. For information on this training, please refer to the United Way's website at www.volunteersolutions.org or you can call 2-1-1.

Sharon M. Garrard is the CHOICES Regional Coordinator. The address and phone number are:

North Central Area Agency on Aging, Inc.
2 Hartford Square West, Suite 101
Hartford, CT 06106
(800) 994-9422 or (860) 724-6443

The CHOICES program website can be found at:

www.geocities.com/ncaaaus/Choices.html



Alzheimer's Association Website

The Alzheimer's Association of CT has a new and enhanced website with information on statistics, a description of Alzheimer's disease and information on services such as support groups, legal resources and hospice and respite care. The new website is: www.alzct.org, or you can call their toll-free number, 866-3MEMORY.



Nurturing Families Network

The Children's Trust Fund has established a home visiting program to engage and support families when their first baby is born and to prevent problems from occurring afterward. The program is called **Nurturing Families Network**, formerly known as Healthy Families. Evaluations conducted by the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research are showing strong results: improved parent-child interaction, increased rates of well-child care, increased financial stability, and reduced incidence of child abuse and neglect.



Operating in 19 of the 29 state's birthing hospitals, this program provides first-time parents with information and support; regular nurturing parenting support groups; and home visiting services to high-risk parents. In 2002, more than 5,000 new parents were screened and received services.

For more information, contact Ruth Sales, the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund Director of community-based services, at (860) 550-6545.

New Law Concerning Marriage Licenses

As of October 1st, couples no longer need to obtain a marriage license from the clerk of the town where the ceremony is to take place, but can now obtain a license from the town in which either partner lives. The marriage ceremony can take place in any town in the state, not just the town where the license is issued. This legislation originated in the Public Health Committee. (Public Act 03-188)





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At the Capitol:
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In the District:
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(860) 521-3554

Please Keep in Touch with Representative David McCluskey

State Representative

David McCluskey

For further information on 2003 Acts Affecting:

- *Business
- *Children
- *Education
- *Environment
- *Health Professionals
- *Major Public Acts
- *Seniors
- *Veterans

*Procedure for obtaining lifetime passes
to state parks and beaches for Seniors
age 65 or over

*Living Will Packet

... Contact my office at 240-8585

United Way - 211 INFOLINE

Since 2-1-1 was launched by the United Way and Infoline as the easy access telephone number for human services questions, tens of thousands of requests have been made by West Hartford residents. Connecticut is one of the first states in the country to have such a service and our high quality, comprehensive 2-1-1 service is setting the standard.

The top five subjects of questions by residents are: Helpline counseling, substance abuse services, housing, utility assistance, donor services.

In addition to its information, referral and crisis services, Infoline offers the following specialized programs:

Child Care Infoline -	Dial 2-1-1
Maternal Child Health -	Dial 2-1-1
Child Development Infoline -	1-800-505-7000
HUSKY Health Insurance -	1-800-CT-HUSKY
Care 4 Kids -	1-888-214-KIDS

You can also reach them on-line at
www.infoline.org.

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